

Weaving Gender in Disaster and Refugee Assistance



InterAction
American Council for Voluntary International Action

Commission on the
Advancement of Women

InterAction is a coalition of US private and voluntary organizations (PVOs). This diverse group of 159 member agencies works on a broad range of international humanitarian issues: long-term development; disaster relief, refugee protection, assistance and resettlement; public policy; and building a constituency for development assistance through education of the American public.



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This publication was made possible through support provided by
the Women in Development Office, Global Bureau, U.S. Agency for International Development,
under the terms of Grant No. LAG-A-00-97-00014-00.

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WEAVING GENDER IN DISASTER AND REFUGEE ASSISTANCE

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July 1998



American Council for Voluntary International Action

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PREFACE

Over the past decade, development professionals have learned that taking gender into account enhances effectiveness as well as social justice. More recently, refugee and disaster assistance efforts have begun to grapple with gender issues and their impacts on complex emergencies.

To contribute to the development of “best practices” in this field, during 1998 InterAction organized two opportunities for representatives of member agencies and donors to share experiences and lessons learned. The seminar *Effective Gender Integration in Disaster and Refugee Assistance: An NGO-Donor Dialogue on Strategies that Work* was held in February, and the workshop *Effective Initial Stage Response to Disaster and Refugee Assistance: Gender Programming Lessons from the Field* took place at InterAction’s Forum in April. These meetings represented joint efforts of three InterAction committees: the Commission on the Advancement of Women, the Committee on Migration and Refugee Affairs, and the Disaster Response Committee.

This document, which covers both meetings, is offered as a contribution of the InterAction community to the evolution of new ways of working in the field, aimed at enabling both women and men to be full participants and full beneficiaries in humanitarian and refugee assistance.

Please use this report as verbal “fertilizer” to enrich your thinking and your organization’s capacity to create gender sensitive management and programming strategies. Please consider how the successes and challenges documented here apply to your own work and organization. Many good ideas are presented in the following pages but, as always, it will take dedicated efforts to bridge the gap between “elocution and execution” and to achieve our goal of truly weaving gender into our work.

InterAction plans to document more “best practices” from the field and would like to learn about any initiatives you may undertake. Lets work closely together on these critical issues.

Jim Moody
President
InterAction
June 30, 1998

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The wealth of ideas captured in this document come from the presenters and the participants at the February seminar and April workshop. Their concern and engagement made it possible to gain new insights and identify effective strategies for gender sensitive programming in complex emergencies. Sincere appreciation goes to all the presenters named in the report and to all the participants.

Another group of individuals deserves special recognition, the seminar and workshop planning team. Starting in October 1997, the group met regularly to create meeting designs which would successfully advocate the state of the art of gender integration in refugee and disaster assistance. It was a pleasure to work creatively together, and I would like to sincerely thank them all for their commitment:

- Judy Benjamin, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children
- Jim Bishop, Director, Disaster Response and Resources/Migration and Refugee Affairs, InterAction
- Patricia Morris, Gender and Development Specialist, Commission on the Advancement of Women, InterAction
- Marion Pratt, Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, USAID
- Susan Purdin, Coordinator, SPHERE Project
- Berta Romero, Program Manager, Migration and Refugee Affairs, InterAction
- Mary Hope Schwoebel, Sr. Program Associate, Disaster Response and Resources, InterAction
- Jane Swan, Training Program Manager, Disaster Response and Resources, InterAction
- Amy Woods, Program Associate, Commission on the Advancement of Women, InterAction

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Director
Commission on the Advancement of Women
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PART I

**Effective Gender Integration In Disaster And
Refugee Assistance: An NGO-Donor Dialogue
On Strategies That Work**

REPORT OF THE FEBRUARY 12, 1998 SEMINAR

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A gender approach is important to identify men's and women's differing vulnerabilities to crisis as well as their different capacities and coping strategies, in order to build on these, in order to design effective relief programmes.

- BRIDGE, Gender, Emergencies and Humanitarian Assistance, 1995

Disaster and other crisis situations are not gender neutral. As Reynold Levy, president of the International Rescue Committee put it, "Taking gender seriously requires a *paradigm shift* in organizations. Gender is a pervasive life or death issue." Recognizing and preparing for a paradigm shift was the focus of a one-day seminar entitled *Effective Gender Integration in Disaster and Refugee Assistance: An NGO-Donor Dialogue on Strategies that Work* sponsored by InterAction's Commission on the Advancement of Women, the Disaster Response Committee and the Committee on Migration and Refugee Affairs. The seminar focused on how to change the way NGO's conceptualize, organize and work in crisis situations, with a goal of better service provision in terms of the differential needs of women and men.

The day began with an overview of the state of the art of gender programming featuring a keynote address by Judy El-Bushra, Research Officer for the UK's Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development (ACORD). The address was followed by small group discussions on successes and challenges to gender integration, an NGO-Donor roundtable luncheon, and a working group session in the afternoon. Approximately 60 representatives were in attendance from 15 InterAction member organizations, USAID, UNHCR, FEMA, OFDA, CDC, and UNICEF.

The report begins with a description of the opening activities, which included welcome comments by Margaret Lycette, Director of USAID's Office of Women in Development and a short session on seminar participants' expectations for the day's activities. This was followed by a keynote address by Judy El-Bushra of ACORD in the United Kingdom (See Appendix I for full text). The keynote address sparked a lively question and answer period that set the tone for the subsequent small group discussions. In the small group discussions, seminar participants were asked to identify successes and challenges to gender integration in their own organizations' work on disasters and complex

emergencies. Seminar participants found that there were numerous unshared success stories and the report lists both the successes and challenges participants identified. The report also summarizes the presentations from the luncheon roundtable where representatives from the United Nations, government and non-governmental community highlighted the constraints and challenges their respective organizations face in integrating gender in disaster and refugee assistance. Lastly, the report chronicles the afternoon's working group discussions on agency action plans and highlights the pledges made by seminar participants to integrate gender in disaster and refugee assistance.

WELCOME

Gender plays a defining role in our work in this area.

- Margaret Lycette, Director, USAID, Office of Women in Development

Margaret Lycette, the Director of USAID's Office of Women in Development, opened the seminar by welcoming participants and discussing the importance of integrating gender in disaster and refugee assistance. "Gender," she asserted, "plays a defining role in our work in this area." She suggested that *what* we do, *how* we do it, and the corresponding impact on societies caught in the midst of disasters and complex emergencies are distinctively molded by gender and gender roles. She argued that too often women are marginalized in the distribution of food and supplies and in camp management structures. She stressed the importance of two types of interventions: (1) involving women in camp design that she contends leads to more secure camps and (2) providing education and skills training. She concluded her remarks by highlighting USAID's policy of mainstreaming gender in its programs versus the previous focus on women's programs.

Immediately following the welcome address by Margaret Lycette, Suzanne Kindervatter, the Director of InterAction's Commission on the Advancement of Women, facilitated a short session aimed at identifying participants' hopes and expectations for the day. Expectations ranged from getting more information to becoming re-energized so that professionals in the field would not have to attend another seminar ten years in the future. Expectations are listed below:

- bring proposals back to the field
- get more information on available resources
- bridge refugee women's experiences with resettled women's experiences
- get re-energized; don't want to be here 10 years from now
- get gender policy examples for use in field
- look at women as resources not just victims

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

My argument is that crisis situations are never gender-neutral: they involve and impact men and women in different ways, and if our interventions are to be effective they must take this into account.

- Judy El-Bushra, ACORD, UK

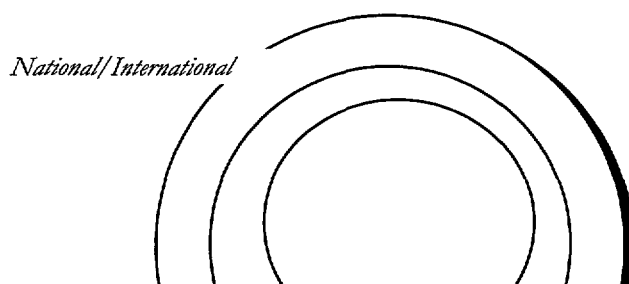
In her keynote address Judy El-Bushra provided a framework for incorporating gender programming in both rapid onset and protracted emergencies. “Complex emergencies,” she argued, “affect females and males differently making it imperative to incorporate gender in the daily work of disaster and refugee assistance.” Gender serves as a lens with which to understand emergency situations, facilitate the effectiveness of relief measures and enhance the affected community’s capacity to rebuild. Ms. El-Bushra spoke of the opportunity for change that war, conflict and disasters provide us. As we take on that opportunity, we must remember that it is difficult to address the needs of one gender without addressing the needs of the other. This, she emphasized, is the true essence of a gender focus versus a woman-focused approach. In other words, gender is about both males and females, not just women. It becomes important then to look at gender in terms of roles, institutions and ideology.

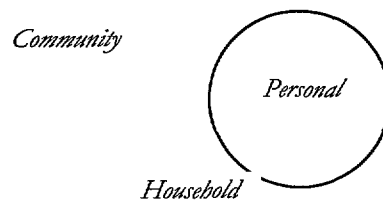
Ms. El-Bushra went on to unpack what we mean when we speak of disasters. She made a distinction between two types of disasters: (1) rapid onset emergencies and (2) protracted emergencies. Rapid onset emergencies, like the Rwanda Crisis of 1994, are “unexpected” and require an urgent response. Protracted emergencies, like in Somalia and Palestine, are more long term, permanent crises. She concluded her unpacking of terms by distinguishing among four types of displaced persons: (1) refugees, (2) internally displaced, (3) returned, and (4) besieged. She also highlighted the fact that in Britain they use the term “complex political emergency” in place of “disaster”.

Ms. El-Bushra’s keynote address next turned its attention to ways in which women are affected by crisis situations. Women in complex emergencies, she argued, are subject to attack due to their role as food provider. Ms. El-Bushra talked of how women have become victims of land mines in Vietnam and victims of gun fire by food raid gangs while standing in a food cue in Somalia. Ms. Bushra also spoke of how crisis situations change gender roles. In Uganda where it was men’s traditional role to buy salt, soap and pay the family’s bills, it is now women’s work. The emergency in Uganda not only increased women’s work but also led to less rigidity in the assigned gender tasks for both women and men.

Ms. El-Bushra then went on to present a framework for assessing what types of gender impact take place in complex emergencies. In her framework, impact can occur on four levels: (1) the personal level, (2) in the household, (3) at the community level, and (4) at the national and international level (See Figure I). While each level creates its own impact in a complex emergency, all four levels are also inter-related.

Figure I. Levels of Gender Impact in Complex Emergencies





Ms. El-Bushra went on to highlight some of the following changes in gender relations that are sparked by crisis situations:

- demographic profile changes: in armed conflict situations, more women than men may survive;
- expectations for marriage and children: for example in Rwanda there is discussion as to whether the government should reinstate polygamy;
- changes in division labor between men and women: these changes can be long term or even permanent (see Uganda case above); and
- increased political participation and organization: women in particular learn to gain greater confidence and see the benefits of working with other women.

Ms. El-Bushra then shared some recommendations for integrating gender in rapid onset emergencies. In terms of distribution of food and other needed goods, she stressed the importance of identifying and meeting the needs of both men and women. She also stressed the importance of building on women's strengths and capabilities. It is important for disaster and refugee assistance providers to see women as survivors on whom other survivors depend. She also stressed the importance of preparedness through early warning groundwork built on local knowledge, the skills and awareness of internal staff, and through management support of training. It is important, she says, to react urgently, yet think long-term. Lastly, she stressed the centrality of protection issues, particularly in camp lay-out and security.

Ms. El-Bushra also made a set of recommendations for incorporating gender in protracted emergencies. Here she stressed the importance of monitoring changing gender relations, the provision of livelihood and income generating support to both men and women, the demobilization of soldiers, and an identification of who plays what roles in peacemaking and protection issues.

Ms. El-Bushra concluded her keynote presentation with recommendations from the EuroStep (European Solidarity Towards Equal Participation of People) Paper on *Gender and Humanitarian Assistance*. Some of the recommendations for NGOs included: (1) investment in preparedness strategies based on: the social impact of disasters, the differential impact of disasters on males and females, and rapid consultation with the affected community; (2) providing training, monitoring and management support for staff; including policy, decision-making and "front-line" personnel, to enable them to respond effectively to women's needs; (3) investment in the development of rapid and participatory

methods of research, needs assessment and planning; (4) the identification of humanitarian principles; (5) the identification of sector specific gender strategies; (6) the role donors can play using conditionality to support positive initiatives; and (7) the establishment of minimum level practices to eliminate gender-based vulnerabilities and responses. In her final remarks, Ms. El-Bushra emphasized the importance of the assistance community's impact on the lives of the people in complex emergencies. "We tend to think we are neutral," she says, "but how we act *does* influence long-term outcomes."

Ms. El-Bushra's keynote address was followed by a question and answer period. Most of the questions focused on the issue of culture and what service providers can do to ameliorate or at the very least avoid reinforcing negative cultural practices. One seminar participant, for instance, raised the question of what to do about offering support to traditional structures that are not gender sensitive. Ms. El-Bushra suggested working with women's organizations that tend to be stronger than those in pre-disaster communities. She argued that bringing women's organizations in contact with traditional structures can be helpful in reducing negative gender impacts. Another participant raised the question of the difficulty of impacting the social dynamics in a complex society particularly in terms of peace-building. Here, Ms. El-Bushra argued that in post conflict societies there eventually emerges a critical mass, from various areas of society, who want peace. She gave the example of Northern Uganda where peace initiatives involve traditional cleansing rituals prior to the reintegration of male, youth soldiers into society. When asked if there were similar cleansing rituals for girls abducted to be brides, Ms. El-Bushra lamented that it takes longer for girls to recover than for boys because of the impact of rape on a girl's self-esteem and her image in society.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

More work needs to be done on the impact of disasters on male roles.

- Seminar Participant

Ms. Bushra's address sparked a lively discussion among seminar participants and fostered the sharing of a number of gender integration success stories. Participants at the seminar talked about the institution of a micro-credit program for displaced Bosnian women, a small business and apprenticeship program in Vietnam, the reintegration of demobilized female soldiers in Eritrea, and the use of gender analysis in the initial stage of data collection in Angola. A significant characteristic of the success stories shared is the combining of two or more sectors in the provision of services to people faced with complex emergencies. Seminar participants found that combining a nutrition program with small business training or incorporating the socio-cultural context in an HIV/AIDS health project effectively addressed the complex gender-based needs of refugees and other displaced persons. Participants were excited and heartened by the number of gender integration success stories and the opening the seminar provided for reports of successes. The following is a more detailed list of the successes identified by seminar participants.

EXAMPLES OF GENDER INTEGRATION SUCCESSES

- micro-credit program for displaced Bosnian women
- small business apprenticeship programs in Vietnam
- reintegrating demobilized female soldiers in Bosnian and Eritrea
- combining two sectors to meet women's needs, for example nutrition and small-business training
- identifying the socio-cultural context of women's lives in relation to HIV/AIDS
- developing gender indicators for different programmatic sectors
- adopting new recruiting strategies and outreach to women
- using a gender lens in initial stages of data collection in Angola
- including both male and female staff in field positions
- involving various divisions of an organization in the development of a gender initiative
- combining a reproductive health program with a mixed (male/female) awareness group

- income generation program that taught Liberian female refugees to build houses
- discussion groups with young male refugees in Mexico on women's roles
- scheduling segregated, alternative time ESL classes for women in Philippines
- providing non-formal education classes for refugee girls, focusing first on education and then on reproductive health issues
- having women sell food as middle managers thereby serving the role of equitable food distributors and as informal "peace keepers" in Somalia
- targeting both men and women in projects on sexual harassment and gender violence (e.g. Tanzania)
- drawing parallels with domestic violence and international violence
- focusing on families not just individuals
- using professional women staff in crisis situations including the diplomatic corps.

Seminar participants also discussed the range of challenges to integrating gender in disaster and refuge assistance. Just as the combination of sectors was seen as an asset in meeting the gender needs of displaced persons and refugees, coordination of differing sectors was also seen as a constraint. Participants spoke of the need and the corresponding difficulty of exploring male roles in order to better service males who find themselves in complex emergencies. Women's ethnic identity and their frequent lack of neutrality in a conflict were also identified as a constraint, particularly in cases where service providers assume that women are neutral peace-makers. While the seminar participants were encouraged by the number of untold success stories the seminar uncovered, the difficulty of translating lessons learned into policy was also identified as a constraint to gender integration. The following is a more detailed list of the challenges identified by seminar participants.

EXAMPLES OF GENDER INTEGRATION CHALLENGES

- difficulty in coordinating different sectors
- inclusion of men and an exploration of men's roles
- difficulty in getting funding for gender integration
- difficulty in translating lessons learned into policy
- failure to "walk the talk"
- failure to share success stories
- women's ethnic identity and frequent lack of neutrality in complex political emergencies

- practice of infrequent targeting beyond elite women
- lack of integration and consultation with local NGOs and the NGOs' own biases
- traditional culture
- resistance by men and women
- rushing into a disaster and ignoring women's groups in decision-making
- lack of opportunity for follow-up
- cultural issues like female genital mutilation.

After the small groups had reported back on the successes and challenges they identified in their own work, a full seminar discussion led to the identification of common elements which emerged in the group discussions. Those common elements identified by the group are as follows:

- the definition of gender as including women's and men's roles and relationships
- the critical need to partner with local NGOs
- the necessity of a separate space for women that is connected to larger projects
- the gap between policy ideals and practices
- traditional culture
- the role of female refugees as providers, not just victims
- the need to focus on women's benefits to the wider community.

NGO-DONOR ROUNDTABLE

Taking gender seriously requires a paradigm shift in organizations. Gender is a pervasive life or death issue.

-Reynold Levy, President, International Rescue Committee

During the NGO-Donor Roundtable, presenters addressed organizational challenges to gender integration. Presenters on the roundtable included Reynold Levy, International Rescue Committee; Marion Pratt, Office of Federal Disaster Assistance; Susan Purdin, SPHERE Project; Paula Lynch, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, Department of State; Hanna Baldwin, US Agency for International Development/Office of Women in Development; Bemma Donkoh, UN High Commission for Refugees; Mary Diaz, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, and Kathleen Newland, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Presenters spoke of the gap between elocution and execution in integrating gender in disaster and refugee assistance. Some factors which account for the gap include the need for gender training of staff, a lack of partnerships with women's networks in host countries, the tendency to reinforce negative cultural practices, and the paucity of senior management support for gender integration efforts. The presenters also talked about the continuing gap between guidelines and field operations in areas like food distribution, reproductive health, sexual violence and camp topography.

Bemma Donkoh from UNHCR spoke specifically about the challenges UNHCR faces in mainstreaming gender in the institution's work. Ms. Donkoh began by informing the group that UNHCR's guidelines were currently under revision. She then went on to identify a number of organizational challenges that UNHCR faces including the building of an organizational structure for gender. She also noted the difficulty in implementing gender mainstreaming policy particularly in terms of accountability and general gender awareness. She identified a couple of operational dilemmas UNHCR has faced. UNHCR has grappled with the question of mainstreaming versus the institution of focal points. Mainstreaming has been more of a challenge for UNHCR because it involves the incorporation of gender in all aspects of the agency's work. The institution of gender focal points, however, has been a more successful enterprise for UNHCR because it involves the institution of a gender unit from which to promote gender mainstreaming. UNHCR has established regional advisors for women as a way to promote gender mainstreaming. UNHCR has also grappled with the issues of empowerment versus cultural resistance and cultural restraint. In many cases, UNHCR's efforts to empower women are challenged on cultural grounds. What may be seen as empowerment for women in one context is seen as or argued to be a departure from cultural norms in another. She concluded her remarks by stating that UNHCR and other service providers' goal should be the assurance that gender integration begins at asylum and is incorporated all the way to repatriation or resettlement.

In his comments, Reynold Levy, IRC, argued that gender is a pervasive life or death issue for refugees. The severity of this reality requires a paradigm shift in the way service providers do their work in disaster and refugee assistance. Levy identified eight areas where we need to take gender seriously. These areas include: (1) food distribution where women need to be included in the decision-making process, (2) income generation which may mean developing non-traditional skills, like training

women in home construction, (3) reproductive health services which should be incorporated in all planning and implementation stages, (4) sexual violence from which women need to be protected, (5) girls education and cultural sensitivity, (6) gender sensitivity in the structure, topography and design of a refugee setting, (7) public policy and advocacy on gender integration and (8) leadership on gender integration by senior organizational managers.

Marion Pratt spoke of the work OFDA is currently doing on gender, particularly the current expansion of their guidelines to include gender. She emphasized the need to take gender issues seriously and the need to identify the *why* and *how* of gender in disaster and refugee assistance. More specifically, she stressed the importance of three things: (1) determining how lessons from the integration of gender in the field of development can be adopted to disaster assistance, (2) determining what the gender integration objectives in disaster and refugee assistance may be and how those objectives might be carried out and, (3) emphasizing that gender refers to relationships between men, women, children and adolescents.

In her comments, Susan Purdin spoke of the SPHERE Project, a project aimed at identifying minimum standards in humanitarian response which will be highlighted in a humanitarian charter for people affected by disasters. Gender, she argued, is a cross-cutting issue focused on two areas: (1) the integration of gender in programming and (2) the integration of gender in organizations themselves. Gender she argues is an ethical issue and she stressed the need to be proactive.

Paula Lynch, BPRM, provided a number of recommendations for integrating gender in organizations. First, she identified the critical need in terms of leadership at the top. This leadership, she argued, needs to be buttressed with substance and strong policy. It is also important, she insisted, to clearly identify and articulate how a gender approach will improve organizational service and quality. Similarly, it is critical for men to get the message on gender integration and then to carry the message. Crossing the bridge between policy and operation in the field, she says, requires salesmanship. She also spoke of the importance of looking for new opportunities to include gender in disaster work like incorporating the trafficking of women in the migration debate. There are some issues, she argues, that you have to go back to the mat for over and over again, for instance food distribution, but the most important thing, she says, is to rejoice when you find others that "get it" and to support them in their efforts.

In her comments, Hanna Baldwin, AID/WID, spoke of her recent visit to Sierra Leone, an experience which highlighted the need for gender integration in disaster and refugee assistance. All the PVOs she met with said that there were no qualified women for staff positions, hence the lack of female disaster workers. Women and women's organizations were not targeted for recruitment or for distribution programs for seeds or tools. There was no consistent message on gender integration to expatriate staff from the top. Furthermore there was no knowledge of UNHCR guidelines. Given these observations, Ms. Baldwin stressed the need for training, the need to raise the awareness of staff of NGO and donor organizations, and the need to develop concrete strategies to integrate gender in disaster assistance.

Mary Diaz, Women's Commission on Refugee Women and Children, began her comments by stating, "The good news is that gender is an issue today in a way that it was not some time ago." She stressed the need to talk about women's human rights in disaster and refugee assistance. She also stressed the importance of developing a collaborative model to bridge the gap between policy and on the ground programming. She emphasized three important points: (1) the need to train and engage local staff on these issues, (2) the need to partner with women's networks, to engage them and link them to international networks, and (3) the need to acknowledge that in some instances gender

integration efforts put women in danger and some women may choose not to go forward. She concluded her comments by stressing the need to distribute all the information shared at the seminar.

WORKING GROUPS

Progress is being made. Progress is a long-term process. Progress is not linear.

- Seminar Participants

In the afternoon working groups, participants had the opportunity to discuss challenges within their own organizations and to identify actions they will take. Energized by the lunch roundtable discussions, participants pledged to initiate activities in their organizations including gender training for country directors, the development and dissemination of gender guidelines, and the identification and preparation of best practices. A more detailed list of the pledges follows:

PLEDGES

- conduct a study of partner NGOs on gender interests and needs, staffing, operational policies and programs
- promote discussion on gender programming issues
- identify and interview men and women within the humanitarian agencies and refugee agencies to get a balanced view
- work on guidelines for working with women in transition
- incorporate gender integration content in the SPHERE document
- disseminate materials on gender integration in disaster and refugee assistance to staff
- ensure inclusion of gender in outreach
- promote gender equity standards throughout own organization
- promote gender training for staff and partners
- promote similar seminars in the field
- disseminate useful materials in the field and throughout own organization
- translate tools into action
- address gender inequity towards men

- integrate gender into training programs
- help prepare gender guidelines for project planning and implementation
- identify best practices which can be used to develop gender guidelines
- finalize gender guidelines to be used in proposal review process
- initiate a working group to develop a methodology for data collection on women
- develop and promote the institution of accountability procedures to address gender infractions
- use the network of participants to bring in speakers to increase dissemination of information on gender integration
- work on the development of an underground network to advocate for and foster the promotion of women in management positions
- develop and disseminate gender policy and gender guidelines
- promote the training of country directors
- distribute the report from the seminar to senior management in own organization
- do a gender analysis of gender differences in own organization in terms of number of employees, number in senior management and pay equity
- help develop and to promote institutionalization of formal channels for sexual harassment complaints.

CONCLUSION

The 'tyranny of the urgent' in emergencies tends to override longer-term developmental concerns.

- IDS, Development and Gender in Brief 4: Emergencies

The seminar highlighted the significant role NGOs play in complex emergencies. The impact is neither neutral nor short term, and incorporating gender into disaster and refugee assistance allows for the provision of more efficient and just assistance. Assessing the differential impact complex emergencies have on both females and males and designing interventions sensitive to their roles and needs are crucial next steps. "The good news is," says Mary Díaz, Staff Director of the Women's Commission on Refugee Women and

Children, “gender is an issue today. That was not the case some time ago. That’s real progress!”

PART II

**Effective Initial Stage Response to
Disaster and Refugee Assistance:
Gender Programming Lessons from the Field**

REPORT OF THE APRIL 28, 1998 WORKSHOP

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As follow-up to a well-received February seminar, the Commission on the Advancement of Women, the Disaster Response Committee and the Committee on Migration and Refugee Affairs co-sponsored a workshop at InterAction's Forum '98 in late April. The workshop entitled "*Effective Initial Stage Response in Disaster and Refugee Assistance: Gender Programming Lessons from the Field*" provided an in depth review of best practices from the field. An expert panel, including representatives from the NGO community, UNHCR, academia and the refugee community presented their experiences to InterAction members, government officials, and NGO leaders from Africa, Europe and Latin America. Presenters at the workshop included Joyce Sherman, Reproductive Health for Refugees Consortium; Maureen Connelly, UNHCR; Dr. Betty Hearn Morrow, Florida International University; Judy Benjamin, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children; Lorelei Goodyear, International Rescue Committee; Jennifer Sime, Catholic Relief Services; and Ka Ying Yang, South East Asian Resource Action Center.

The report provides a summary of the comments and recommendations made by the panelists. The recommendations focus on three areas: (1) the goals of the assistance, (2) the scope of the assistance, and (3) the design of the assistance. Presenters at the workshop identified **five factors that should be integrated into the goal of the disaster and refugee assistance:**

1. dignity and self-esteem;
2. independence;
3. comprehensive health care;
4. self-sufficiency; and
5. sustainable skills training.

Presenters also identified **three important factors where the scope of disaster and refugee assistance can be strengthened:**

1. The importance of programming beyond basic needs like food, water and shelter;
2. The importance of widely disseminating information on refugee and displaced persons legal rights to the affected persons and field staff; and
3. The importance of programming for cultural differences in all phases of the assistance.

Lastly, presenters identified **six factors where the design of the relief effort in complex emergencies can be enhanced:**

1. The structure of the assistance should include input from displaced persons, particularly women.
2. Gender sensitive rapid assessment checklists should be utilized at the onset of complex emergencies.
3. The relief effort in complex emergencies should strengthen the process of sustainable development.
4. The relief effort in complex emergencies should include assistance specifically targeted at female and male adolescents.
5. The relief effort in complex emergencies should include the widespread announcement of all distributions of food and other supplies and of other services available.
6. Field staff should be trained in gender analysis, and should include staff proficient in gender and culture assessments.

GENDER PROGRAMMING LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

Overcoming the tyranny of the urgent.

Dr. Patricia T. Morris, Gender and Development Specialist, InterAction's Commission on the Advancement of Women, opened the workshop by welcoming participants and discussing the importance of integrating gender in disaster and refugee assistance. "It is important," she asserted, "for us to overcome the *tyranny of the urgent* in our work on complex emergencies." She stressed that too often we convince ourselves that the emergency is too urgent and the need so overwhelming that there is no time to incorporate gender issues in our response. In so doing, she argued, disaster and refugee assistance becomes less efficient and in some cases may even exacerbate the negative experiences of people in crisis. She stressed the importance of making the time to look at the gender implications of our interventions in disaster and refugee assistance, and the need to overcome *the tyranny of the urgent*. She concluded her remarks by highlighting the Commission on the Advancement of Women's work in this area and its commitment to promoting, sharing and distributing best practices for gender integration in the NGO community's response to complex emergencies.

The personal is urgent in disaster and refugee assistance.

There is one thing that *is* urgent in disaster and refugee assistance, and that is understanding the differential roles and needs of women and men who find themselves in complex emergencies. Joyce Sherman, a Liberian refugee and representative of the Reproductive Health for Refugees Consortium, began the dialogue by tearfully describing how she had been relocated to six different countries including Uganda, Ghana, Senegal, Guinea and U.S. as a result of the Liberian civil war. Sherman noted that as a refugee, “qualifications as a woman had been immaterial.” For refugees, there are continuing unmet needs like finding food, water, and shelter in the host country. Dignity among refugees, she argued, is linked to their collective independence, hence it is important that refugee assistance have meaning beyond handouts, beyond external donors. She also focused on health issues facing refugees, noting that reproductive health tends to be placed second to more immediate material basic needs. Adolescents in particular are the most neglected category of refugees in terms of access to services. Sherman identified four factors that contribute to the lack of services for both internally and externally displaced persons:

1. The host country where a refugee flees may lack an adequate health infrastructure even in good times.
2. Reproductive health is seen as secondary to other assistance such as food and water.
3. Refugees tend not to earn an income, hence they cannot afford to pay for needed services.
4. Reproductive health is conceptualized as family planning, not as a comprehensive health strategy for women and their children.

Ms. Sherman provided the workshop participants with five recommendations on how to improve services by incorporating gender in the assistance to displaced persons.

1. Every effort must be made to involve women as decision makers in the assistance process.
2. Consultations with and input from women who have survived these experiences should be sought.
3. Every intervention should seek to create refugee independence from the start.
4. Every intervention should facilitate each refugee’s ability to reclaim her/his dignity.
5. The needs of adolescents should be highlighted, not forgotten.

Ms. Sherman concluded her remarks by stating that while the needs of displaced persons will differ from situation to situation, the challenge to the community is to modify our assistance recipe to add some new ingredients. In the end, however, the actual method will not change much.

If you’ve got a mess, you’ve got to look at everything.

Following Joyce Sherman’s first-hand look at gender inequality in refugee assistance, Maureen Connelly, Coordinator of NGO Policy, UNHCR, asked, “Why, when we put so much emphasis on

gender policy, does it still not work?” Building on the UNHCR’s Somalia effort, she stressed the importance of communicating in the local language to reach all parts of the population and to establish a more effective system for intervention. Ms. Connelly used the Somali refugee camps in Kenya as an example of a disaster intervention that needed to be more gender sensitive. She spoke of dedicated but inexperienced staff who generally took the position that they were too busy saving lives to pay attention to details. The first days in the camp presented an ongoing life or death situation. Twelve people per 10,000 were dying per day. There was a total breakdown in social norms resulting in ongoing violence including rape and domestic violence. The Somalis in the camp were a rural, nomadic people whose diet consists primarily of meat and milk. Consequently the food basket distributed by the international community was culturally inappropriate. In a situation where health, water and sanitation were of grave concern, there was tremendous difficulty in identifying the camp’s leadership and in providing information to the refugee population at large. These difficulties led Ms. Connelly to recommend the following steps to ensure better and more appropriate services for refugees:

1. Guidelines and information on legal rights must be shared with all refugees.
2. Widespread announcements should be made via loudspeakers mounted on the top of cars to inform everyone in the camp of the distribution of food and goods.
3. Checklists should be used at the onset of an emergency to do a rapid assessment to guide the direction of the humanitarian assistance.

Ms. Connelly concluded her comments by giving a warning to service providers highlighting the fact that they should never say they are “too busy saving lives to look for the vulnerable.”

Gender in disaster response in the U.S.: Is it really that different?

Bringing these issues closer to home, Dr. Betty Hearn Morrow, Florida International University, discussed the social effects of hurricane disaster in Florida and the Caribbean. Her story paralleled those of developing countries where disaster has struck. In both cases, relief workers, in their rush to respond, fail to examine the composition of households and the needs of everyone within the family, including women, children, the disabled and the elderly. Dr. Morrow’s research highlighted the tendency for males to be first in the distribution lines, while those with acute needs such as women, children and the elderly were hidden or absent. Her research also uncovered a coalition of women’s groups bearing silent witness to exploitation, domestic violence and fraud in disaster relief. Those in charge of the recovery in Florida were members of the establishment, primarily elite, white males, with no representation of blacks, Hispanics and women. The composition of the disaster relief leadership fostered disregard of the needs of female headed households. Illustrating the contribution of women in disasters, Dr. Morrow pointed to a coalition of women in Florida who came together under the banner of “Women Will Rebuild,” and accelerated the redevelopment of their community.

Dr. Morrow’s research also found that many of the Federal Emergency and Management Administration (FEMA) policies hindered the relief efforts. For example, FEMA policies required that there be only one designated head of household, yet households in South Florida often had extended and/or complex family structures. Similarly, the temporary housing provided by FEMA was unsuited for large families. In addition, most relief and temporary housing programs were not designed to meet the needs of small children. One seldom found any play equipment or the provision of child care services in the relief effort. There was also little done to address the significant gender differentiated

stress that accompanied the disaster. Women for instance were heavily involved in providing services for the community, but were given very little authority. Women also bore the brunt of the work for the daily survival of their families. Violence against women rose and desertion and divorce rates increased. Manifestations of male stress were found in high levels of drinking, depression, inactivity and violence.

Dr. Morrow presented a set of recommendations on how to better program for the gendered dimensions of disaster response. Her recommendations focused on organizational structure, and on the identification of gender roles and needs:

Organizational Structure Criteria

1. Real advancement in meeting the needs of women occurs when organizations are more inclusive.
2. Real advancement in meeting the needs of women occurs when organizations are less hierarchical.
3. Real advancement in meeting the needs of women occurs when organizations listen to women's voices in ways that matter.
4. Real advancement in meeting the needs of women occurs when organizations provide ample room for minority opinion and new ideas.
5. Real advancement in meeting the needs of women occurs when organizations employ researchers trained in observation, open-ended interviewing, focus groups, and other qualitative methods to observe the things listed in the following checklist on gender roles and needs.

Checklist for the identification of gender roles and needs

- ___ Who is getting the supplies? More importantly, who don't we see in the distribution lines?
- ___ What gender roles are evident for the different cultural groups affected? How can programs be tailored to address them?
- ___ What is the structure of local households? Who lives together?
- ___ What are the lines of household authority? Who does what in the household?
- ___ How are resources allocated within the household?
- ___ How can our response programs work through these lines of authority to reach women?
- ___ Are girls at greater risk for receiving less food, medical care, etc.
- ___ Where are the elderly women? Who is caring for them?
- ___ What are the external networks of support; e.g., family, religious groups? How can these be effectively utilized and strengthened?
- ___ How should resource distribution and other response programs be tailored to strengthen, not weaken, local networks?
- ___ How can women's networks be effectively utilized?
- ___ What can be done to help men deal more effectively with crisis which threaten their perceived roles and identity?

___ What “invisible” economic enterprises of women have been disrupted or destroyed?

___ How can we account for losses in the informal economy and home-based work?

Dr. Morrow concluded her remarks by stating that disaster response should not only respond to immediate needs, the assistance should also strengthen the process of sustainable development, which begins with the household.

Meeting the needs of women in the initial stage of a crisis.

Returning our attention overseas, Judy Benjamin, Women’s Commission on Refugee Women and Children, spoke of the importance accounting for gender can have on a program’s effectiveness. She used the Ngara Refugee Camp in Tanzania as an example of low program effectiveness. In the camp, rape and other forms of sexual violence were rampant, and there were many cases of unsafe abortions. Women who were impregnated as the result of rape were treated as outcasts. Consequently, the relief effort was difficult to carry out, particularly in terms of adequate documentation and confidentiality. There was also a lack of emergency contraception. Needs assessments were difficult to undertake because of resistance encouraged by the Hutu Interahamwe leaders. There were few legal services and little information about legal options offered to refugees.

Ms. Benjamin spoke of the importance of training NGO staff in targeted and measurable programming techniques which help ensure that women benefit equally from relief services, and that involve women in programming in a leadership capacity. She argued that when women have a say in how assistance is delivered and when women have access to benefits, particularly benefits that lead to self-sufficiency, they are less vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Consequently, NGOs on the front lines of humanitarian assistance must play a leading role in fostering programming that depends heavily on the input of refugee and internally displaced women. Ms. Benjamin also shared three important practical suggestions for identifying protection problems in the field. These suggestions, included in the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children synopsis of the UNHCR Guidelines, are as follows:

1. Meet with groups of refugee women and listen to their problems and ideas.
2. Identify respected women in the community and engage them in finding solutions.
3. Make the UNHCR Guidelines available to as many people as possible, relief agency staff, UNHCR field workers, government officials and refugees.

Ms. Benjamin concluded her remarks by reiterating that refugee and internally displaced women do not participate equitably in NGO programs in spite of the dedicated efforts by NGOs to increase women’s participation. “Confusion exists,” she says, “on the part of national and international NGO staff as to what is meant by *participation*.” She gave an example where one manager commented that women “participate” when they constitute at least half of the agency’s food recipients. This manager’s view, she argued, blurs the important distinction between women as “recipients” and women as program “participants.” While recipients are given what others deem necessary, participants help determine what services are necessary. No one understands this distinction better than refugee and internally displaced women. Ms. Benjamin highlighted this point in a story about a young mother who had recently returned to her devastated village in Sierra Leone. While sharing her frustrations, the

woman recounted that, “we were cheated out of a full scoop of grain at each distribution – we complained, but no one listened.”

Sexual violence response and prevention in emergency settings

One area in complex emergencies where there has been considerable silence and not enough listening is sexual violence. Lorelei Goodyear, Reproductive Health Program Officer for the International Rescue Committee (IRC), spoke on response and prevention strategies for addressing sexual violence in emergency settings. She began her comments by noting that sexual violence has occurred in a number of complex emergency settings including Bosnia, Rwanda, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Tanzania, Liberia and Uganda. She then identified five factors that are required to effectively address sexual violence in complex emergencies. There must be a recognition of the problem, advanced planning, basic training and supplies, interagency coordination, and consultation with refugee women. She also argued that it is important for relief efforts to overcome two misconceptions. The first misconception is that the emergency phase is too chaotic for dealing with sensitive social problems like sexual violence. The second is that women will not talk about a taboo subject like sexual violence. Ms. Goodyear argued that the IRC's work in both Tanzania and post-conflict Congo-Brazzaville clearly demonstrated the centrality of sexual violence to relief efforts. In both cases, new female arrivals to refugee camps reported rapes by soldiers, and male arrivals also reported rapes of female relatives. Ms. Goodyear presented the following treatment protocol for sexual violence in complex emergencies:

Treatment Protocol for Sexual Violence in Complex Emergencies

- ___ Assess injuries and treat wounds
- ___ Provide pain relief medication
- ___ Document injuries for evidence
- ___ Provide prophylactic sexually transmitted infection (STI) treatment
- ___ Counsel on emergency contraception
- ___ Treat or refer abortion complications
- ___ Refer to UNHCR for legal follow-up
- ___ Refer to social services as available

Ms. Goodyear also recommended a number of strategies which allow for the provision of efficient services for the survivors of sexual violence. Those strategies include:

1. The best interest of the individual women should be the leading principle in the provision of services.
2. Confidentiality is essential.
3. Reporting is critical to the gaining of support from affected refugees.
4. Sexual violence services should be provided from the point of first contact.
5. Social workers and Reproductive Health Coordinators should be posted in refugee camps.

6. Key informants are useful in the collection of information on the extent of sexual violence.
7. The reproductive health and counseling infrastructure in urban settings can be useful in providing services.
8. Staff should be oriented to sexual violence prevention and guidelines for response.
9. Medical protocols adopted for the local context should be designed.
10. Sexual violence questions should be included in assessments.

Ms. Goodyear concluded her presentation by stating that sexual violence and its consequences do not end with the end of conflict, consequently it is imperative that relief providers talk to refugee women so they can better respond to and prevent sexual violence in emergency settings.

Lessons learned from women's participation programs.

Following Ms. Goodyear's discussion of strategies for responding to and preventing sexual violence in disaster and refugee assistance, Jennifer Sime, Catholic Relief Services, focused her comments on lessons learned from a women's participation program in Southern Sudan. The program was funded by the U.S. Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and was designed to promote grassroots development in a war torn area. The project was an income generating project which focused on the production of sunflower seed and oil. The oil shortage in the area led to a significant local market for the products. Consequently, the goal of the project was the cultivation of 200 acres of sunflowers by a 800 member organization, the National Sudan Women's Association of displaced and returnee women. Catholic Relief Services provided seeds, tools and the initial capital and training for the project. The organization was divided into a number of committees at the village level. Each member cultivated one quarter of an acre of land and part of the profits were used to expand the business to other communities. Ms. Sime argued that there are a number of lessons learned from this project than can be transferred to other sectors and other geographical areas. Those lessons are as follows:

1. Involve women early and don't wait until the emergency phase is over.
2. Work with indigenous women's groups, they reach women effectively and these women know and trust each other.
3. Involve women in income generation projects that help them make a living and feed their families.
4. Let the targeted women decide what types of activities should be implemented in their communities. In so doing there is a reduction in their dependency on humanitarian assistance and an increase in women's decision-making roles.
5. Focus on capacity building always keeping in mind that skills should be transferable and that women in complex emergencies can make use of their skills in different settings.

Ms. Sime concluded her remarks by reinforcing the point that successful gender planning must involve the entire community, and it should also provide for an increase in women's skills base for long-term sustainable development.

Preserving women's and men's self-esteem is central to effective relief efforts.

Returning the workshop's attention to the personal, Ka Ying Yang, Executive Director of the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, closed the panel discussion by reinforcing the importance of communication and culture in times of crisis. Ms. Yang, a Hmong refugee, stressed the desperate need to assist women and men as they struggle with the loss of self-esteem that often follows complex emergencies. It becomes important, she argued, for us to look critically at what we do at crisis time to help both men and women.

Two major factors in this critical assessment are communication and culture. Too often interpreters in relief situations are males, which in the Asian context elicits a certain level of respect from women that leads to less forthcoming responses during the assessment and information gathering stages of relief efforts. "We should never be too confident," she warns, "or we are likely to miss a lot of relevant information." The second important factor is culture. Ms. Yang presented some strategies to deal with the challenges culture often poses in complex emergencies. While the goal, she argues, is to preserve culture, relief providers must be mindful of the fact that there are in a crisis situation. Although the culture may equate leadership with men, women should be consulted in relief efforts. What becomes important then is the venue where women are consulted. Ms. Yang suggested that relief workers consult with women in classrooms and other facilities, rather than in their homes where they cannot speak openly and candidly about their circumstances in the presence of their spouses.

She also provide the following four additional suggestions for designing more effective gender sensitive relief efforts:

1. Relief efforts should include interventions that educate female refugees and displaced persons on the services available to address sexual assault and sexual violence.
2. Women should be educated on where to go and what to do in these situations.
3. Relief efforts should also include information on what women can do when their needs are not being met.
4. Lastly, relief efforts should be designed to address male loss of self-esteem.

Ms. Yang concluded her remarks by reiterating the importance of focusing on and programming for the differential loss of self-esteem women and men face in the wake of complex emergencies.

Take time, my friend, take time.

Dr. Beverlee Bruce, Chair of the Women's Commission on Refugee Women and Children and moderator of the workshop ended the session with a phrase she learned to appreciate in Liberia: "Take time my friend." Even in a disaster, whether it be domestic or international, the relief community needs to take the time to assess the differing gender needs of both women and men and use the information to improve the quality of their assistance.

CONCLUSION

The workshop highlighted the important role gender plays in complex emergencies and the impact it can have if ignored. Disregarding gender in favor of addressing what is narrowly defined as the urgent in an emergency may do more harm than good. Taking time for gender is not only the right thing to do, it is also the efficient and effective thing to do when programming relief efforts. When the NGO community begins to actively integrate the strategies proposed by the speakers at the Forum workshop, positive changes will occur in the quality of assistance to displaced persons, be they female or male. Weaving gender into the goals, scope, and design of relief efforts should be at the core of what it means to provide emergency assistance.

APPENDICES

Appendix I... ..Seminar Keynote
Address

Appendix II... .. List of Documents Available from CAW

Appendix III... .. Selected
Bibliography

**THE STATE OF THE ART:
GENDER PROGRAMING IN ACTION**

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION FOR SEMINAR ON EFFECTIVE GENDER INTEGRATION IN
DISASTER AND REFUGEE ASSISTANCE: AN NGO-DONOR DIALOGUE ON STRATEGIES
THAT WORK

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What I shall be aiming to do in this presentation is to outline some basic elements of a framework for approaching the issue of gender and disasters which may be useful to keep in mind as a guide to discussion during the rest of the day. I'm going to divide the presentation into three sections: I'll begin by exploring what is actually meant by some of the terms in our title: 'gender', 'disasters', and 'refugees', and why gender might provide important dimensions to our understanding of crisis situations, and then I look at some practical and policy-related implications that may arise in different circumstances. Finally I will attempt to draw out some broad recommendations for both implementers and donor agencies. In summary, my argument is that crisis situations are never gender-neutral: they involve and impact on men and women in different ways, and if our interventions are to be effective they must take this into account.

Let's first be clear what we mean by gender: the classic definition is that gender refers to socially constructed differences between men and women. We are not talking here about sexual or reproductive differences - those differences that are inherent to our nature as men or women - but about characteristics which we acquire as a result of our socialisation into a particular social group. We can see these gender differences manifested in a number of ways, but principally through:

- gender roles, ie. the activities and behaviours which are expected of men and women in social and economic life (the 'division of labour');
- social institutions such as family, marriage, the state, which ensure that we learn and comply with those roles;

- ideological reinforcement through religion, history, language, literature, the media and the arts.

Certain important points follow from that:

- Societies vary, so we can't make assumptions about what the pattern of gender relations will be in any particular place, or at any particular time. For example, in a town in Sudan called Kassala, there is an ethnic group in which women are economically active, and visibly so, spending a large part of their time in agricultural production and animal-rearing, and marketing their produce, and purchasing other goods with the income. For another group living in the same town, it is rare for women to be employed or to generate their own incomes, to be concerned with buying and selling, or to be seen in public places. So you couldn't assume that women in Kassala will all be behaving in the same way. And gender is a dynamic concept - we can probably all think of examples of how gender relations change by comparing our own lives with those of our parents.
- Gender is not only about women, but about women and men and their relationship within a social context. Both men and women make up society as a whole, and there is a degree of interconnectedness between them which means that the problems of one cannot be dealt with in isolation from the other.
- The relationship between men and women is essentially one of power. The tendency is - and the way it works will be different from place to place - for men to be decision-makers, to control strategic resources, and to act in the public arena (in politics, for example), while women occupy the domestic, private sphere, control only less strategic resources, and are excluded from major decision-making processes. However, though this may be true in general terms, the issue of social power and how it is exercised is a very complicated one. Women also have their own arenas of decision-making and control, and power relations also exist amongst men and amongst women - based, for example, on other differentiating factors such as age, ethnicity and economic class.
- In development work in general, gender is seen as being an important issue both as 'lens' through which societies and social differentiation can be more accurately understood, and as a project of transformation towards equality, both within the communities we are working with and in our own agencies.
- In the specific case of disasters and emergencies, both women and men contribute to the cohesion and survival of communities under threat.

Projects which acknowledge and build up women's roles as well as men's are more likely to be effective in strengthening capacity to withstand disasters.

Now if we look at the next part of our agenda, 'disasters', I am not going to talk about natural disasters as distinct from the man-made variety, because we are beginning to see that there are very few purely 'natural' disasters. Even climatic crises such as cyclones or floods can be more severe or less severe depending on how the affected community deals with the crisis. Some people are more vulnerable than others in withstanding the threats which a crisis poses. At this meeting, I suggest we are particularly concerned with conflict related emergencies, or what some people are calling 'complex

political emergencies' or CPEs. A CPE is a type of emergency that arises from a combination of political and other factors. We could take the example of Northern Mali, which recently underwent a period of armed conflict giving rise to serious population displacement, arising from a combination of diminishing environmental resources, competition over water sources, and political unrest at the national level.

Without wishing to get too involved in discussing categories, it may be helpful to consider rapid onset and protracted emergencies. As you might expect, rapid onset emergencies are sudden and unexpected, and require an urgent response from relief providers in order to protect lives. A classic example is the Rwanda crisis of 1994, when half a million refugees fled across the Rwanda border into Tanzania in three days (even though, in retrospect, serious questions arise about whether its onset was really that unpredictable). Indeed, a lot of serious questions have arisen about the international response in rapid onset emergencies generally. What usually enables people to survive in the immediate aftermath of a disaster is their own survival skills - humanitarian assistance can play a role in the medium to long term, supporting people's own coping strategies, but the real heroes are the survivors themselves.

In protracted emergencies, on the other hand, people may live for years in permanent crisis to which no political solution seems to be forthcoming. The civil war in Somalia is one such situation, where people have been surviving now for seven years with no security, no government, and no infrastructure or services. At what point is it appropriate to transform relief interventions into longer-term strategies for reconstruction?

Now let us come to the issue of refugees. Clearly refugee movements have been one of the main, and internationally perhaps the best known, of the consequences of both rapid onset and long-term crises. We need to distinguish between refugees, who cross international borders and thereby become the statutory responsibility of UNHCR, and internally displaced people or IDPs, who may suffer equal deprivations but not qualify for international recognition or support in the same way. However, the sorts of displacements which are observed in conflict emergencies are much more varied than this. Among refugees, for example, distinctions may need to be made between different waves of refugees (as in Rwanda, where refugees who left at different periods in response to different events and sought refuge in various other places, are now coming back to Rwanda and bringing with them different histories and different needs for support and integration). Among IDPs there are those who move for short periods, returning to their homes from time to time, for example to work on their fields, and those who move to different parts of the country and who have little expectation of returning. This is to say nothing of those who have been shunted into 'protected villages' or 'peace villages' and are therefore virtually under siege. Each of these situations give rise to its own peculiar form of vulnerability.

Crisis impacts on men and women differently because of their different social roles and different responsibilities. Crisis situations are therefore not gender neutral. People's decisions about how best to mitigate threats (to flee or not, which possessions to leave behind, etc.) depend on their social position and the sort of support they can expect from others. We need to think for a moment about the sort of ways in which women are affected - not because they are somehow worse off than men, but because this needs to be known if we are to develop a proper understanding of the processes involved. We tend to think of war as something which is the exclusive province of men, but women are also involved in it in different ways. Women too are susceptible to physical violence - if not through their active engagement in warfare, then through their accustomed roles as food providers and as caregivers. In Cambodia, after families had fled from their homes it was usually women who took responsibility for returning through the firing lines, or through minefields, to collect the harvests. In

the Rwanda genocide, men and boys tended to be killed outright while women were targeted for rape and attacks which often left them disabled as well as widowed. When men are killed or families divided, women with dependents need to fill the place of both parents, often having to survive economically by learning new skills or by turning to socially unacceptable livelihoods. Women and men both suffer the loss of loved ones, and at the same time the psychological effect of the loss of purpose and self-esteem which the loss of family members entails. Social attitudes to women may also change during crises: if a society's identity comes under threat one result may be greater control and restrictions on women's behaviour (as happened in Somalia during 'Operation Restore Hope' when women who were seen talking to foreign soldiers were beaten and imprisoned). That's just a few examples to give you an idea of some of the ways in which women have described their experiences of war. One thing that maybe needs to be underlined is that the impact on young men and women has huge repercussions for future gender relations, especially youth being forced into conscription and 'used' in Sierra Leone, Uganda and Mozambique.

We said earlier that gender is a dynamic concept. Over time, we can expect conflict-driven change in gender relations to:

- alter demographic profiles and hence marriage expectations (in Rwanda now some people are debating whether to legalise polygamy because of demographic imbalance);
- change the division of labour, with women - often permanently - taking on more tasks and men fewer;
- lead to greater political participation by women and stronger women's organisations, as a result of women's greater confidence and greater awareness of their role in times of crisis.

So, what would it mean if we were to take gender into account in emergencies? Let us bear in mind that we are looking at gender as being both an analytical device and a goal of social transformation. So it follows that emergency interventions which take gender into account will do three things:

- understand how women and men have needs which may require to be met in different ways, and indeed that women have certain special needs for example in relation to sexual and reproductive health (Developing this understanding may require special strategies since women themselves may be relatively 'invisible' for information-collectors);
- recognise that women and men have different roles and capabilities which intervention may either reinforce or undermine, and that these roles and capabilities have to be researched in each case;
- seek opportunities to enhance women's active role, as well as men's, in managing their own and their community's affairs, as a prerequisite to social reconstruction.

This agenda sets a challenge to humanitarian assistance providers since it raises some fundamental questions about their roles and procedures and their internal structures and functions. This is particularly true in the case of rapid onset emergencies and specifically the problem of urgency. The need to act quickly to save lives is often used as a reason for not doing the research, preparation and thinking which a gender approach would require. But there is evidence that if attention is not paid to women's needs and agency in crisis situations, this can lead to them being denied access to food and

to other relief, goods and services, as well as undermining their existing position. For example, one finds examples of food distributions where only male household heads are issued with rations. Distributing rations on a household basis overlooks the possibility of polygamous or large families, or of unfair distribution within the household. (Tanzania example of blankets) It seems that the most effective strategy for distributions is to consult women about what is needed and about who are the priorities to receive it.

A further point is that how can be as important as what. Urgent actions can be done in ways that have long-lasting effects, e.g. the experience of women participating in the implementation and management of relief programmes shows that this can have the long-term effect of building their capacities and self-confidence, an effect which in turn pays dividends in terms of post conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation. A project in Sri Lanka helping displaced families with income generation grew rapidly in numbers after the decision was made to target women. The management of the project was handed to the women and the project gains included women taking part in peace negotiations as well as better family incomes and strong local organisations. We need then to question the idea of 'vulnerability' on which so much emergency intervention planning is based. If women are 'vulnerable', it is because of the threats posed to their integrity by people's behaviour and attitudes, not because of inherent weakness on their part. They cannot be described as a 'vulnerable group' in the way that orphaned children, or the aged can be. They are survivors, on whom the survival of others may depend.

There are indeed some disaster situations where the urgency of the immediate response means that - at least in the beginning - researching social difference is simply not a priority. However, we might now ask what lessons have humanitarian agencies learned, from their experience, which could help close the gap between the need for rapid reaction on the one hand and the need for equalising impact on the other. In other words, can we develop organisational strategies to maximise preparedness? We should for example, be able to use our research and networking capacity to alert the international community to emerging crises and make the necessary investigations before the crises happen. We could develop working contacts with local non-governmental bodies and academics who could provide immediate sources of local knowledge and expertise. And we could overhaul our procedures for staff development, recruitment and training so that we could expect gender sensitivity from staff at all levels, and so that we could give greater autonomy to local staff (and especially women) in developing appropriate intervention plans.

A somewhat difficult transition to be made from emergency provision to rehabilitation and reconstruction. Changing gender relations are an important factor in this transition. There is a danger of new conflicts emerging out of old ones, especially if demobilised militia are not reintegrated. Changes in gender relations need monitoring and can be crucial in enabling stability in the future. We need to enable men to gain access to viable economic opportunities, and at the same time make space for women's voices in new structures and institutions. We need to be aware that women sometimes gain while men may lose in such situations, and that ultimately both will be the losers as a result. We need to understand the requirements and the potential for reconciliation at different levels, and identify the roles that different actors may play in this process. Women may have a particular strength as peace builders, where their position in the kinship system or in political structures renders them neutral - where they may make use of the 'power of the powerless'. In Northern Uganda for example, Acoli women are active in local reconciliation moves and have organised demonstrations and held meetings with local and national government to put their case. They say they have 'no clan' and therefore speak as wives and mothers, without axes to grind.

Let me now try to summarise what are the main lessons which I think have been learned to date, and which might form recommendations to implementing and donor agencies. I would also like to refer you to a paper which you will find in your packs which was prepared by Eurostep, a European network of humanitarian agencies, and which has a very full set of recommendations at the end. The first two [recommendations] are not specifically about gender, but are important in developing improved performance measures generally.

Firstly, we should stop seeing emergency relief provision as being guided by a special set of short-term principles which distinguish it from those of 'development'. The same commitment to participation, to 'listening to people', to reinforcing local capacity and organisations, applies in all our work.

Secondly, we should use existing experience of operating in emergencies to invest in preparedness, which will mean taking a longer term view of such institutional functions as staff development, research and networking.

Thirdly, we need to develop gender strategies covering all aspects of our work. For example, strategies to deal with gender equality issues in relation to refugee camp administration, physical layout and security, registration and the distribution of relief goods, treatment of rape survivors, income-generating activities, maternity provision, sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, agriculture, and a host of diverse issues which might form part of our brief in any particular emergency situation. A gender sensitive approach will ensure that women's needs are identified and met, but it will not seek to minimise the needs of men nor to deal with either in isolation from each other.

Fourthly, we need to seek policy convergence between implementing and donor agencies. Donors can exert an important influence by using grant conditionalities and reporting requirements to emphasize the value of developmental approaches and move away from purely quantitative, short-term criteria. They can work against the relief-rehab-development divide by integrating criteria for different budget lines. They can support operational agencies more indirectly by funding research, policy development and capacity building.

In conclusion, if I could choose one point to emphasize most strongly, I think it would be this: as implementers of assistance measures, we cannot sit on the sidelines in splendid neutrality, believing that we are just there to save vulnerable lives. How we act, who we listen to, what we understand their strengths and weaknesses to be, who we decide to support and how, all of these are important ingredients which may make all the difference to the prospects of the people we are aiming to assist, both immediately and perhaps more significantly - in the future.

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prepared for the InterAction seminar
*Effective Gender Integration in Disaster and Refugee Assistance:
An NGO-Donor Dialogue on Strategies That Work*
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C.
12 February 1998

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